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## Nicolas Sarkozy's Legitimisation of the Front National

### Background and Perspectives<sup>1</sup>

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Many commentators saw in Jean-Marie Le Pen's poor result in the 2007 presidential elections as the beginning of the end for the Front National. However, when a journalist asked whether it was the end of her father's political career, Marine Le Pen replied smiling: 'I don't think so. In any case, this is the victory of his ideas!'<sup>2</sup> In this question and answer, one finds the entire story of the Front National and its impact on mainstream politics in the past two decades. Firstly, the exaggeration of Le Pen's defeat was similar to that of his 'victory' in 2002. In what was seen as the demise of the Front National, Le Pen actually managed to obtain almost 4 million votes, despite the candidature of far right Philippe de Villiers. Furthermore, that Le Pen managed to retain these votes despite the adverse context was a victory in itself. Finally, the new record set by his daughter in the 2012 presidential elections, and the election of his granddaughter in the legislatives showed the Front National was alive and well. What this paper will demonstrate is that the five years between the 2002 and 2007 presidential elections led to drastic changes in the way politics was done in France, and made Le Pen's 2012 record a very likely outcome.

The evolution of the Front National during this period was two-fold. First, the media anchored the fear of another 21 April 2002 in the minds of left-leaning voters, an electorate that in 2007 would turn en masse to support the Socialist candidate, whoever it was. Also, during Jacques Chirac's second mandate, the moderate right further accepted the idea of appealing to Le Pen's electorate, leading to a form of politics that at times bordered on extreme right propaganda. This was best exemplified by Sarkozy's return to the forefront of mainstream right politics. As the 2007 elections dawned, the French electorate was thus broadly divided into three parts: the left-leaning one with a 'never again' approach, refocusing on the previously discredited Socialist Party, a traditional right-wing electorate turning to a neo-liberal Sarkozy and a broader right-wing electorate extending from the centre to the extreme right, which would also turn to Sarkozy to conduct a 'rupture' in

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<sup>1</sup> This is a forthcoming article to be published in *Patterns of Prejudice*, 47(1), February 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Marine Le Pen, "Interview," in *+Clair*, ed. Canal + (Paris: Canal +, 22 April 2007).

French democracy. Although many voters remained with Le Pen and abstention remained a major player in the French democratic landscape, these settings reduced both, and strengthened the hold of major mainstream parties. Various theoretical frameworks exist through which to advance an explanation of this shift away from the extreme right in 2007. Three such reasons will be presented here. First, following theories on the successes, failures and fluctuations of the extreme right, it is likely that the focused media campaign against the Front National resulted in a decrease in the support of protest voters for Le Pen's party. As noted by Wouter Van Der Brug et al., protest parties from the radical right become less attractive to this type of voter as soon as they become too powerful. As the Front National proved itself able to reach the second round of the presidential elections, it was no longer judged inoffensive and a 'safe' way to protest.<sup>3</sup> Further, as Joost Van Spanje and Van der Brug have noted, influential extreme right parties across Europe tend to fare better when they are ostracised, as through this exclusion they appear as a more potent alternative. Often, if kept outside of decision making, extreme right leaders argue that they are the ones with clean hands, a powerful call in democracies where corruption scandals have seriously damaged trust in politicians. When accepted however, and thus normalised and 'mainstreamed' (as the Front National increasingly became after 2002), the appeal of this party diminishes.<sup>4</sup> Take these first two reasons with caution, however, for, central to this article, lower results in elections do not necessarily mean that extreme right parties have lost popularity<sup>5</sup>: part of the loss of appeal, in the case of the Front National, was linked to the borrowing of their programme by their opponents. Thus an electoral defeat proved an ideological victory.

What this article will argue is that the 2002 presidential elections can be equated to an 'earthquake' within French politics. However, this 'earthquake' did not trigger a Jean-Marie Le Pen tsunami, but rather a tidal wave of misinformation and misunderstanding of the real interests and novelty of the results of these elections. This paper will then highlight

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<sup>3</sup> Wouter Van der Brug, Meindert Fennema, and Jean Tillie, 'Why some anti-immigrant parties fail and others succeed: A two-step model of aggregate electoral support', *Comparative Political Studies* 38, no. 5 (2005): 542.

<sup>4</sup> For more detail, see Joost Van Spanje and Wouter Van der Brug, 'Being Intolerant of the Intolerant. The exclusion of Western European anti-immigration parties and its consequences for party choice', *Acta Politica* 44, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>5</sup> Van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie, 'Why some anti-immigrant parties fail and others succeed: A two-step model of aggregate electoral support'.

how this misinterpretation led to the consecration of right-wing populist politics best exemplified in the landslide election of Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007. To do so, I will first concentrate on the analysis of the 2002 elections and how their true relevance was ignored. This will in turn highlight how the Front National was further demonised on one side of the political spectrum, and yet legitimised on the other. Finally, by concentrating on speeches given to various audiences throughout his campaign and early presidency,<sup>6</sup> on his programme and books and relying on various linguistic studies, I will focus on the way Nicolas Sarkozy in his race has coopted Front National rhetoric, and, by doing so, legitimised Le Pen's party rather than combating and defeating it, as has been widely advertised.

### The Earthquake of 2002

A number of metaphors were used to describe Jean Marie Le Pen's accession to the second round. Most referred to natural disasters, showing clearly the state of shock into which France, and particularly its commentators, were thrown. Despite the waves of fatalism that flooded television and newspapers, detailing what appeared to be the unstoppable ascension of the extreme right represented by the Front National, a cold-headed analysis shows a peak had been reached. Le Pen's clear defeat by Jacques Chirac, successful with more than 82% of the vote in the second round of the elections, demonstrated the limits of extreme right support and its inability to actually reach power, at least at that time.

The Front National's 2002 results were predictable, both because France's primary extreme right party had been experiencing a constant progression since 1982, and also because of the erosion of the base support of both major parties (Jacques Chirac's Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) and Lionel Jospin's Parti Socialiste). The disenchantment of important parts of the electorate with these 'moderate' governing parties led to a narrower margin to a third contestant such as Le Pen than had ever

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<sup>6</sup> Speeches studied in this article were delivered between 2003 and 2010. Their selection follows the development of Sarkozy's populist rhetoric; further, the selected speeches were given to a variety of audiences and thus offer a deeper understanding of the borrowing of issues linked to the extreme right agenda and rhetoric. For the period before the election, this article also relies on the extensive linguistic and statistical analysis undertaken by Louis-Jean Calvet and Jean Véronis, whose statistical study of Sarkozy's speeches from 2003 and 2007 is an outstanding secondary source. Jean Veronis and Louis-Jean Calvet, *Les Mots de Nicolas Sarkozy* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

previously been seen. Similarly, many factors in 2007 made it unlikely that the Front National would induce another 'earthquake' of similar magnitude to that of 2002. First, Jean-Marie Le Pen, seventy-nine at the time, no longer represented the new and fresh force he had aimed to incarnate throughout his political career. The presence of his youngest daughter by his side was not yet enough to counteract the effects of old age, and was even at times detrimental. As she created a more respectable, perhaps even moderate, image of the party and brought in a new generation of voters, Marine Le Pen also alienated parts of the more radical core of supporters without any dramatic increase in support in the young electorate. Not until 2011 and her landslide election as president of the party would the 'Marine effect' prove successful. Further, five years of intense media coverage of the events of 2002 and of the shame that was felt by the French population made any strong protest vote, even for the Front National, highly unlikely; it seemed clear that the majority of those who had voted for smaller parties in 2002, to protest against the politics led by the Parti Socialiste and the UMP, would not reiterate such a risky warning. Therefore, it was logical that the Front National 'only' managed 10.44% of the vote and ranked fourth in the tally, far behind the moderate parties of the right, the left and the centre (François Bayrou's UDF – Union pour la Démocratie Française – renamed Mouvement Démocrate or MODEM in 2007).

In light of previous presidential elections, the results of 2002 were not so much of a surprise, and certainly not an 'earthquake', as advertised in the media. The Front National and the Mouvement National Republicain obtained around 5.5 million votes, around 900,000 more than they had when unified in 1995. However, this radical right 'breakthrough' is nuanced by the absence of de Villiers, who had put the overall extreme right result at around 6 million votes in 1995. In 2002, the extreme right could therefore be argued to have achieved a relative decrease.<sup>7</sup> In fact, in the extremely favourable circumstances, an increase from 4.5 million votes in 1995 to 4.8 million can be perceived as barely of consequence. Despite the passion triggered by the results of the first round, the second round was a mere formality for Chirac, who won with 82% of the vote. Despite slight

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<sup>7</sup> More so than in the case of de Villiers, it is problematic to add the 1.2 million votes obtained by CPNT since this rural electorate seems to differ from a typically extreme right-wing electorate.

changes in his electorate, Le Pen's result barely increased, showing the limits of the radical right during elections.<sup>8</sup> Further lessening the groundbreaking character of the Front National's result, between 1988 and 2002, Le Pen's vote increased by less than half a million votes in an electoral register comprising more than 41 million people in 2002.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, trends clearly showed that the Front National's accession to the second round was foreseeable, as support for mainstream parties had consistently declined in recent elections. In 1981, the three major parties (the Socialists and the two mainstream right-wing parties) gathered 57.57% of registered voters (or 72.17% of the vote) and in 1988, 56.29% (or 70.61%). After two decades of Mitterrandism and periods of cohabitation, these three parties obtained only 47.77% (or 62.72%). After another mandate that was again marked by cohabitation, corruption and increasing social unrest, the tide was unlikely to turn and its worsening was a clear possibility. In 2002, the three mainstream parties together barely managed to top the record level of abstention for a presidential election (29.67% against 28.40%), a striking figure given very little attention compared to Le Pen's 'victory'. Less than a third of those registered to vote chose to trust the parties that had led them for over fifty years. Yet it was the Front National that made the front page and not its opponents' failure or the myriad other minor parties that benefited from the growing disillusion. Jacques Chirac, who, as expected won a landslide victory against Le Pen in the second round (82% of the vote), had qualified with the approval of only 13.75% of those registered to vote.<sup>10</sup> He became the worst-performing first-round candidate to be elected president during the Fifth Republic, and yet the elected president with the highest majority in French history. In the meantime, Le Pen's vote only increased by a few tens of thousands of votes, showing clearly the limits of his appeal, even when faced with a less than popular candidate.

In the two weeks between the first and second rounds, demonstrations and calls for a 'great republican front' (against Le Pen) made the front page of most newspapers. What

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<sup>8</sup> Le Pen received 5,525,906 votes against 5,472,160 in the first round (Front National and MNR). For changes in the electorate, see Nonna Mayer, *Ces Français qui votent Le Pen* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002). 365-66.

<sup>9</sup> James Shields, "Support for Le Pen in France: Two Elections in Trompe L'Oeil," *Politics* 30, no. 1 (2010): 63.

<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, according to a poll, only 29% of the respondents who voted for Chirac did so because he was 'a good candidate'. Mayer, *Ces Français qui votent Le Pen*: 378.

many considered their democratic duty forced them to vote against Le Pen, rather than for Chirac, in the second round. Following calls from most party leaders, many were forced to condone the reinstatement of a system they had tried to denounce with their first ballot. Only one of the many extreme left parties (Force Ouvrière) did not ask their supporters to vote for Chirac. Since it was impossible for Le Pen to win; demonstrating and voting were merely a cleansing ritual. The limits of the radical right had again been proven and yet it embarked on a new era where its ideas would become increasingly mainstream. Le Pen was now populism's greatest advocate and, in a perverse twist, defined the Gaullist Chirac as the candidate of the 'Occupation' and himself, 'man of the people', as the candidate of the 'Liberation'.<sup>11</sup>

It is not surprising that it was only after Le Pen's accession to the second round of the 2002 presidential elections, and after the media stressed to the extreme his apparently growing popularity, that Sarkozy was permitted a return to the forefront of politics. Before then, the former rising star of the right had mistakenly supported Edouard Balladur in 1995 against Jacques Chirac and failed in his launch of a neo-liberal party: Sarkozy was a pariah. Yet in 2002, his authoritative tone granted him a landslide victory in parliament, and made him an increasingly powerful minister of the interior and then finance minister from 2002 to 2004. In November 2004, Sarkozy left the government to dedicate himself to the presidency of the UMP. With this mandate, he reshaped the Gaullist party into his personal movement with a view to the 2007 elections. Within a year, he returned as minister of the interior to rescue the government after its failure at the European referendum.<sup>12</sup> The 2006 demonstrations against the new work-rights laws led to the downfall of his nemesis, prime minister Dominique de Villepin,<sup>13</sup> leaving Sarkozy as the only credible right-wing candidate in the 2007 presidential elections.

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<sup>11</sup> Pierre-André Taguieff, *L'illusion populiste: Essai sur les démagogies de l'âge démocratique* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007). 255, 263.

<sup>12</sup> On 29 May 2005, 54.68% of French voters rejected the European constitution. Moderate parties had supported the treaty and appeared therefore to have further lost touch with their electorate.

<sup>13</sup> The *Contrat Première Embauche* (First Job Contract) was implemented in 2006 before being repelled by president Chirac after important demonstrations. The demonstrators argued against the unfair dismissal clauses that would have allowed employers to terminate a contract without justification during the first two years of employment.

Without a convincing opponent, and as had become common, the Front National appeared to the mainstream right as a potential threat. It seemed possible that voters might prefer the 'original to the copy', and choose Le Pen over Sarkozy regarding issues of insecurity such as delinquency and crime. Another 'April 21' could have seen Ségolène Royal and Jean-Marie Le Pen sent to the second round, leaving Sarkozy stranded.<sup>14</sup> However, with the help of populist rhetoric, Sarkozy did to Jean-Marie Le Pen what he also did to popular centre candidate François Bayrou. The UMP leader managed the difficult combination of pseudo centre-left-wing and reactionary radical right-wing rhetoric in order to lure the electorates of both of his closest enemies. The voters he appealed to were most probably part of the 'soft core' of both the Front National and Modem parties, those who were not ideological voters, and who saw in Sarkozy the only chance they had for some of their ideas to reach power.

### Sarkozy's Reactionary 'Rupture'

*We need to react and I will lead the reaction.*<sup>15</sup>

*I want to tell the French the truth; I want to be sincere; I want to be honest.*<sup>16</sup>

*I made Gramsci's analysis mine: power is won through ideas.*<sup>17</sup>

Nicolas Sarkozy played a major part in reshaping the political discourse in France. This was obvious in the way he manipulated values which were until his rise thought of as extreme and often undemocratic. The shift in what was acceptable or not was based on a new understanding of 'common sense', which many politicians had begun crafting and perfecting as the Front National rose in the polls. Thus, the meaning of 'Sarkozy' is not restricted to the man himself. While Nicolas Sarkozy has been the most potent symbol of moderate parties' recent tendency to embrace right-wing populism, he is not the only politician to have embraced exclusionary rhetoric and politics. Nor is he the first. In the past, many other 'moderate' politicians proved willing to flirt with and legitimise the radical right. In 1976, prime minister Chirac made a correlation between France's 1.5 million unemployed and its 1.5 million immigrants; in 1984, prime minister Laurent Fabius admitted that Le Pen

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<sup>14</sup> '21 April' became a common phrase in the news to remind voters of the day Le Pen reached the second round of the presidential elections.

<sup>15</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours à Toulouse', (Toulouse 4 February 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours à Besançon', (Besançon 13 March 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Sarkozy in Nicolas Beytout et al., 'Sarkozy : 'Le vrai sujet, ce sont les valeurs'', *Le Figaro* 17 April 2007.



‘asked the right questions’; in 1989, president Mitterrand agreed that the ‘tolerance threshold [in matters of immigration] had been exceeded’<sup>18</sup>; in 1991, Socialist prime minister Edith Cresson deported illegal immigrants to the satisfaction of Mégret,<sup>19</sup> while former president Giscard d’Estaing linked immigration to an ‘invasion’; that same year, future president Chirac denounced an ‘immigration overdose’ and the ‘noise and smell’ of African families.<sup>20</sup> Chirac was also largely responsible for making the issue of insecurity central to the 2002 presidential campaign, despite a vast majority of the French admitting to feeling safe.<sup>21</sup> This borrowing from Le Pen’s rhetoric by mainstream politicians even led the leader of the Front National to ironically point out that ‘Chirac and Giscard d’Estaing had considerably outflanked him’.<sup>22</sup> Scapegoating minorities and fuelling the fear of the ‘Other’, both typical right-wing populist tactics, had become common, however Sarkozy can be seen to be original for a number of reasons. While other mainstream politicians (both right and left-wing) have made use of extreme right rhetoric in the past three decades, none did so in such a consistent and open manner as Sarkozy. In his own word, the French president became the face of an ‘unabashed right’, a right which would do all it took to reclaim the Front’s electorate.

Sarkozy’s rhetoric was crucial in his 2007 victory. His understanding of politics and campaigning owes much to the rise of the Front National, notably in his constant use of populism. However, the impact of his comments on mainstream politics had a reach that Le Pen could have only dreamt of: the respectability of the various positions he held in government facilitated the legitimisation of many ideas previously considered in conflict with democracy. This is not to say that Sarkozy was an extreme or radical right leader, let alone that twenty-first century France has succumbed to a form of fascism. Sarkozy’s

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<sup>18</sup> This Etienne Balibar more appropriately called the ‘intolerance threshold’. Etienne Balibar, ‘Racisme et Crise’, in *Race, nation, classe; les identités ambiguës*, ed. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (Paris: la Découverte, 1997), 292.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Fysh and Jim Wolfreys, *The Politics of Racism in France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 72.

<sup>20</sup> For more detail, see Sylvie Tissot and Pierre Tevanian, *Les Mots Sont Importants, 2000/2010* (Editions Libertalia, 2010), 86-89.

<sup>21</sup> While 58% of the French believed that insecurity was one of the three most important factors in their decision during the first round of the elections (74% in Le Pen’s electorate), 68% felt ‘entirely’ or ‘rather’ safe in their daily life. Mayer, *Ces Français qui votent Le Pen*: 351-55.

<sup>22</sup> Fysh and Wolfreys, *The Politics of Racism in France*: 72.

takeover of radical right themes has been limited for the most part to rhetoric, although it is clear that some of his populist stunts have had serious repercussions.<sup>23</sup>

Central to this successful rhetoric were the Gramscian ideas of common sense and hegemony. It is by relying on 'common sense' rhetoric, popularised by Le Pen and the Nouvelle droite,<sup>24</sup> that Sarkozy shaped himself as the 'voice of the people', or more precisely, the voice of a series of peoples whose composition varies according to theme and audience. The concept of 'people' in right-wing populist rhetoric is never closed and definite, and nor is it all-encompassing; it takes on many different, yet always exclusionary, meanings. Sarkozy's 'people' were opposed to the elite, to an 'old left', to a 'certain kind of left', to 'hoodlums', to 'scum',<sup>25</sup> to those who profit without working, to idlers: all of those portrayed as enemies of the 'people' and France in general. Often, Sarkozy's insistence on the value of work was reminiscent of Margaret Thatcher's 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. It highlighted the necessity of creating a dichotomy in the lower classes of the population who might otherwise be opposed to a neo-liberal agenda. To create and convince his 'people', the manipulation of language became essential to Sarkozy's campaigning and governing. His strategy recalled that devised by Gustave Le Bon in the nineteenth century and his adept and expert propagandist and advertising guru Edward Bernays.<sup>26</sup> As Louis-Jean Calvet and Jean Véronis have pointed out in their research dedicated to Sarkozy's speeches, 'simplicity, concision, and quasi-obsessive repetition led [them] to resemble an advertisement'.<sup>27</sup> The importance of language and rhetoric in Sarkozy's populist take-over was also reminiscent of the 'vocabulary war' launched by adepts of the Nouvelle droite in the 1980s and 1990s, which drew on a carefully developed

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<sup>23</sup> The deportation of illegal immigrants, which has become increasingly violent since annual quotas were implemented, is a clear example of the consequences Sarkozy's rhetoric has had on politics.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre-André Taguieff, *Sur la Nouvelle droite: jalons d'une analyse critique* (Paris: Descartes et Cie, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> 'Scum' (*racaille*) was a term used by Maurras, who added that in France 'one comes in at ease, does whatever one pleases and leaves only if one wants to'. Jean-Paul Gautier, *Les Extrêmes Droites en France; De la Traversée du Désert à l'Ascension du Front National (1945-2008)*, Mauvais Temps (Paris: Syllepse, 2009). 403. Sarkozy had 'had enough of always feeling one has to apologize for being French' and believed that 'if some don't like France, they should feel free to leave it'. Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours de bienvenue aux nouveaux membres de l'U.M.P.', (Paris 22 April 2006). This sentence was reminiscent of the slogans used first by Le Pen and then by Philippe de Villiers: 'France, love it or leave it!'

<sup>26</sup> Edward Bernays, *Propaganda, comment manipuler l'Opinion en démocratie* (Paris: Zones, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Veronis and Calvet, *Les Mots de Nicolas Sarkozy*: 27. Sarkozy's sentences were 30% shorter than those of Ségolène Royal during the 2007 presidential campaign, his vocabulary much poorer and 44% of his sentences contained anaphors.

right-wing Gramscianism, and which deeply influenced Le Pen in his appropriation of populism.

In fact, Sarkozy's populism was often revealed by the inconsistencies within his discourse. Sarkozy said or implied very different things depending on the context, on his audience, on his target, and also on his ghost writers. The populist shift was obvious when Henri Guaino became central in Sarkozy's speech-writing team.<sup>28</sup> As the 2007 presidential campaign became increasingly focused on personalities rather than politics and ideas, Guaino was hired precisely when it seemed the right-wing leader was losing ground to his Socialist opponent. While Sarkozy symbolised a masculine, if not macho, rupture, Ségolène Royal became the incarnation of the soothing and protective mother.<sup>29</sup> Eventually, Sarkozy's attitude and rhetoric became untenable; by being too extreme, he had alienated himself in a similar way to Le Pen before him. The more receptive the French were to Royal's motherly inclusiveness, the more threatening Sarkozy's violent language appeared. Consequently, on January 14 2007, a few months before the elections, Sarkozy declared ten times in one speech he had 'changed'.<sup>30</sup> While the programme was left largely unaddressed, its delivery also 'changed' in the extreme: Sarkozy no longer attacked, he gathered; his rupture became oxymoronic 'quiet'; the candidate of an 'unabashed right' began borrowing heroic figures from the left; he was no longer the defender of Capital, but that of the worker; he was no longer the angry one, but the one unfairly hated for defending freedom of speech against the elite's 'groupthink' (*pensée unique*); he was the defender not of 'the right or of the left, but of the truth'. Sarkozy 'had a dream'.<sup>31</sup> As Le Pen's rhetoric had changed under the influence of the Nouvelle droite, so did Sarkozy's under Guaino.

In keeping with contradictions and despite an increasingly empathic vocabulary, Sarkozy remained true to his exclusionary agenda. He emphasised further the division

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<sup>28</sup> Guaino had played an important part in Chirac's 1995 victory, notably in the social rhetoric the candidate adopted. It is interesting to note that some of his most important advisers came from the extreme right and were central in decisions such as the creation of the a minister of immigration and national identity. For more detail, see Augustin Scalbert, 'Derrière l'offensive sécuritaire de Sarkozy, deux conseillers-clés', *Rue89* (14 August 2010), <http://www.rue89.com/2010/08/14/derriere-loffensive-securitaire-de-sarkozy-deux-conseillers-cle-162290>.

<sup>29</sup> For more detail, see Veronis and Calvet, *Les Mots de Nicolas Sarkozy*.

<sup>30</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours inaugural du congrès de l'UMP', (Paris 14 January 2010).

<sup>31</sup> For more detail on this shift in rhetoric, see Veronis and Calvet, *Les Mots de Nicolas Sarkozy*.

between those who worked hard and those who did not; those who deserved help, empathy and sympathy, and those who were responsible for their exclusion; those who worked hard to be French and those who did not and should leave. As Sarkozy sent signals simultaneously to the left, the extreme left and the extreme right, his programme remained anchored in a neo-liberal agenda best exemplified in his tax reforms favourable to the wealthy.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly to Le Pen, in the quest for hegemony over the concept of the 'people', practical results came second for Sarkozy. Highly symbolic policies resulting from Sarkozy's extreme rhetoric were often delayed or rebutted by higher institutions such as the Constitutional Council.<sup>33</sup> Yet crucial for Sarkozy was not the implementation of these policies in particular, but the appeal he gained from such promises. To seduce a disenchanted electorate, increasingly distrustful of the 'establishment', the UMP candidate based his campaign on the idea of a 'rupture'. Sarkozy would not continue Chirac's politics, or any of his predecessors'. He would not govern for a small fraction of the population, but for all, ignoring the contradictions in his neo-liberal programme. He would be both the face of an 'unabashed' right,<sup>34</sup> proud defender and friend of the rich,<sup>35</sup> and, at the same time, that of a president close to the people and to their daily struggle.

To do so, Sarkozy would spend a huge amount of energy reshaping public discourse and bringing forth many ideas which could strengthen his support within the extreme right electorate. One of these ideas was the use of national identity as ethno-exclusivism.

### National Identity as Ethno-exclusivism

*France is a miracle.*<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> One of the most emblematic of Sarkozy's promises and measures was the creation of the 'fiscal shield' (*bouclier fiscal*) to limit taxation to a maximum 50% of one's earnings. Another example is the repeal of the inheritance tax, something which resulted in benefits for only the richest 15% of the population, yet was advertised as allowing every French person to be a home-owner at the end of their hard-working life.

<sup>33</sup> For more detail see, Serge Portelli, *Nicolas Sarkozy: Une République sous Haute Surveillance* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours à Tours', (Tours 10 April 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Sarkozy spent the night of the 2007 election in the very exclusive *Fouquet's* nightclub in Paris before leaving for a yacht vacation sponsored by his billionaire friend Vincent Bolloré.

<sup>36</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours à Caen', (Caen 9 March 2007).

*To become French is to subscribe to a form of civilisation, values and mores.*<sup>37</sup>

As in the above quotes, the conception of national identity as ethno-exclusivism was highlighted further in Sarkozy's decision to create a minister for immigration and national identity. This idea emerged as the 2007 election campaign was drawing to an end, and was key to understanding Sarkozy's ideological and populist use of language. The proposition was considered one of Sarkozy team's winning moves; it was drawn up as part of Sarkozy's conservative electorate grew suspicious of his shifts from left to right. His neo-liberal agenda, allied with the recuperation of iconic figures from the left, increasingly alienated those who had seen Sarkozy as the defender of a nationalist, traditionalist France. In this context, the new portfolio offered two main advantages. First, Sarkozy borrowed once more Le Pen's popular anti-establishment posture: he was a candidate willing to 'break taboos', and 'to express the ideas the French people think and carry within themselves'.<sup>38</sup> It also sent a clear signal to the radical right electorate: if the issues of immigration and national identity were to be linked in a ministerial position created by Sarkozy, the two concepts would most likely become antagonistic.<sup>39</sup> As argued in his programme, 'undeniably, our worst forsaking [was] to have stopped being proud to be French [...] if I am elected I will not cease to affirm our pride in being French'.<sup>40</sup> Sarkozy therefore drew a clear dichotomy between those who rightly felt proud to be French, and those who did not, those who were responsible for the dire situation in France. For Sarkozy, this dramatic situation justified the project:

*our republican model is in crisis. This crisis is first and foremost a moral crisis. [...] This moral crisis is a crisis of values, a crisis of landmarks, a crisis of meaning, a crisis of identity. The denigration of the nation is at the heart of this crisis.*<sup>41</sup>

In the apocalyptic language of the extreme right, Sarkozy described the identity crisis as 'a serious crisis, a profound crisis and a dangerous crisis'.<sup>42</sup> Often, Sarkozy's understanding of this 'crisis' was reminiscent of the vision of the early French extreme right, Barrès amongst others, as well as of the rhetoric used as late as the 1980s when the right tried to appeal to

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<sup>37</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours à La-Chapelle-en-Vercors', (La-Chapelle-en-Vercors 6 November 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours à Caen'.

<sup>39</sup> Symbolically, Sarkozy's first minister for this polemical portfolio was found guilty of a racial slur in 2010. AFP, "Hortefeux condamné pour «injure raciale» et soutenu par Fillon," *Libération* (4 June 2010), <http://www.liberation.fr/societe/0101639511-hortefeux-condamne-pour-injures-raciales>.

<sup>40</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Mon Projet: Ensemble Tout Devient Possible', (2007), <http://archives.u-m-p.org/propositions/index.php?mode=projet>.

<sup>41</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours à Caen'.

<sup>42</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours à Besançon'.

its extreme electorate.<sup>43</sup> All believed in decadence, all saw one symbolic event as responsible for this decadence (the Revolution, the Popular Front or May '68), and all argued for an authoritarian solution based on ethno-exclusivist values and the singling out and superiority of the French people and French identity.

All of them also emotionally defended their position and attacked groups of 'intellectuals' for their self-loathing and hatred of their country. Sarkozy denounced a form of 'intellectual terrorism preventing the majority of our compatriots from defending ideas in which they believe'. Sarkozy made it clear he was not part of that elite: he 'was not an intellectual, he was someone concrete'.<sup>44</sup> Sarkozy knew such an issue to be crucial. He knew a strong stand on the abstract crisis of national identity could be rewarded with the sympathy of over 15% of the electorate, who had been voting for the radical right for over two decades. In a tactical move, he reiterated the position of the reactionary French elites of the nineteenth century. Instead of considering a systemic failure, which created systemic insecurities, and had in the past led to the creation of class identity and the advancement of social causes, Sarkozy relied on an irrational and exclusionary form of identity which saw the other as responsible for the crisis. While the face of the 'Other' changed (Germans, Jews, Italians, Algerians, Muslims, youth in general), the rhetoric remained.

Sarkozy would build France's national identity in a typically extreme right manner: in opposition to emancipatory struggles and events. For Gérard Noiriel, the subtle negation of the Revolution was present throughout Sarkozy's campaign, and was best highlighted in his speeches on France's eternal subscription to freedom and human rights. For Sarkozy, it was not the Revolution or the Enlightenment that had brought human rights into being, but

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<sup>43</sup> In 1985, former president Giscard d'Estaing wrote in extreme right newspaper *Valeurs Actuelles* that immigration constituted 'a threat to national identity', in Gérard Noiriel, *A Quoi Sert 'L'Identité Nationale', Passé et Présent* (Marseilles: Agone, 2007). 71.

<sup>44</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours à Nice', (Nice 21 April 2009); Arnaud Vaulerin, "Et si le gouvernement avait oublié de penser?," *Libération* (23 July 2007), <http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/010120229-et-si-le-gouvernement-avait-oublie-de-penser>. Strikingly, Marine Le Pen utilised almost exactly the same argument against Sarkozy in her 2012 campaign. Most recently, she insisted that she was the candidate with 'concrete' ideas, as opposed to others and their 'opaque' programmes. Marine Le Pen, 'Plan de Désendettement de la France et le Chiffre du Projet', (12 January 2012), <http://www.marinelepen2012.fr/2012/01/14/marine-le-pen-presente-le-plan-de-desendettement-de-la-france-et-le-chiffre-du-projet/>.

rather millennia of national identity; '2000 years of Christian values'.<sup>45</sup> Sarkozy's conception of the nation and national identity was esoteric: France was a 'soul', a 'spiritual principle', 'a carnal soil to which one is bound by a mysterious link [...] that cannot be broken without losing part of oneself'.<sup>46</sup> Sarkozy's conception was again reminiscent of Barrès' of the 'déracinés' (uprooted), an author he at times referred to.<sup>47</sup> His understanding was denounced by many scientists and researchers, who argued that national identity 'should not be granted scientific validity'.<sup>48</sup> Yet such strong beliefs filled a growing void in part of the population that was looking for simplistic certainties, for a sense of belonging, in a world where they felt they had been left to fend for themselves. Sarkozy's conception of national identity was clearly reminiscent of Le Pen's: rather than 'explicit', it was a concept based on the obvious, on common sense. It was Le Pen's aim to give his electorate a sense of belonging by giving them characteristics of either 'similarity' or 'dissimilarity';<sup>49</sup> in any case, the aim of Sarkozy's national identity was to offer Le Pen's electorate a similar kind of 'Us' and 'Them'.

Neo-racism was key to Sarkozy's attempt to recuperate Le Pen's electorate. To prevent being attacked as racist, Sarkozy moved away from traditional forms of racism, insisting that the perfect Frenchman is not necessarily a biological Frenchman. An immigrant or a son of immigrant could well become truly French, and indeed French president. The dichotomy was not drawn between those who have French blood and those who do not, but between those who can be French – that is those who 'inherit' 'Frenchness' by blood or those who become part of a 'successful immigration' – and those who fail to integrate. It is

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<sup>45</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours à Caen'; Noiriél, *A Quoi Sert 'L'Identité Nationale'*: 88.

<sup>46</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours à Caen'.

<sup>47</sup> During his campaign, Sarkozy referred to Barrès as the one who 'wrote for the French youth the story of national energy' Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours à Metz', (Metz 17 April 2007)..

<sup>48</sup> The French Association of Anthropologists also insisted that national identity 'is an imaginary social construct which, under pretence of unity, leads to the reinforcement of divisions, discriminations and inequalities', in Eric Hazan, *Changement de Propriétaire; La Guerre Civile Continue* (Paris: Seuil, 2007). Many 'new philosophers' such as Alain Finkielkraut, however, have supported a mystical definition of national identity. For more detail, see Alain Badiou, Alain Finkielkraut, and Aude Lancelin, 'Finkielkraut-Badiou: le face-à-face', *Le Nouvel Observateur* (17 December 2009), <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/essais/20091217.BIB4611/finkielkraut-badiou-le-face-a-face.html>.

<sup>49</sup> For more detail, see Maryse Soucard et al., *Le Pen, les mots; analyse d'un discours d'extrême-droite* (Paris: "Le Monde" éditions, 1997). 97.

precisely those who fail who have led to 'the miracle being threatened'.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, immigrants are divided into two clear camps: those who deserve to become French and the others, the illegal immigrants and those who preach *communautarisme* (community withdrawal or communalism).

The first category of 'others', which Sarkozy pejoratively called 'clandestines', have come to take advantage of France without giving anything in return: 'the problem with France [and its immigration policies] is that for too long it has asked nothing of no one, not even the respect of its values and laws; [now] it is facing one of the most serious crises of its history'.<sup>51</sup> Sarkozy implied the comforting idea that if the situation was not ideal, it was because 'we' had been taken advantage of, because 'we' had been too kind. Consequently, if 'we' made it tougher on immigrants, things would improve. In fact, as Le Pen had before him, Sarkozy argued that his exclusionary policies were for the good of the immigrants themselves. As a result, illegal immigrants were not only accused of taking advantage of France and stealing its wealth without giving anything in return, they were also infantilised, told what was right for them. In a neo-racist manner, they were found not to be inferior biologically, but merely incompatible with the French way of life.

Similarly, Sarkozy's attacks on *communautarisme* always targeted one particular group within the population. All the examples he gave to highlight this apparently crucial issue sent a clear signal to the Muslim community, or more precisely, to anyone even remotely associated with this community.<sup>52</sup> While the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish religions have been praised in Sarkozy's speeches as legitimate components of French identity, Islam remains unmentioned, except as a counter-example.<sup>53</sup> While there are some cases where Islam has been portrayed in a positive light, for example in the creation of the Muslim council, the defining category nonetheless remains an exclusionary generalisation.

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<sup>50</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours à Caen'. Sarkozy's populist opportunism was further highlighted by the relatively small immigration intake that France witnessed in the 1990s compared to other European countries and the United States. For more detail, see François Héran, *L'Avenir de L'Immigration* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours à Caen'.

<sup>52</sup> For more detail, see Joan Scott, *The politics of the veil* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours à Caen'.



As with the radical right, debate proved futile; for Sarkozy, one either loves France or hates it. As a result, those opposed to his understanding of national identity were accused of the latter position, of being dishonest and cowards. If Sarkozy spoke up on this it was because he 'was not scared', and because he did 'not believe in politics which say nothing, which think nothing'; like the Le Pens,<sup>54</sup> he spoke because he wanted to 'tell the French the truth, to be sincere, to be honest'.<sup>55</sup> By implying the dishonesty of his opponents, Sarkozy presented himself as a martyr, just as Le Pen had. Sarkozy also criticised the 'intelligentsia' for their 'culture of repentance'. France had made some mistakes, but 'not all French people were Petainists', 'not all French people were colonists'.<sup>56</sup> This rewriting of the past would become clear when, soon after his election, in October 2007 in Dakar, Sarkozy gave a speech which provoked a wave of indignation. He argued that colonisation had only played a minor role in shaping contemporary Africa, and should be exonerated from 'the responsibility of the bloody wars Africans are waging amongst themselves, of genocides, dictatorships, fanaticism and corruption'.<sup>57</sup> Sarkozy's vision was unrepentant and consciously ignored the negative impact of both colonisation and neo-colonisation, from which France has benefited greatly.<sup>58</sup> Worse still, Sarkozy blamed the situation in Africa on the 'African' character; he concluded his speech with an unmistakably neo-racist 'historico-political consideration' of the 'African man' who had not 'entered history enough', and whose 'mindset does not leave space for human adventure or for the idea of progress': 'never [does the African man] venture towards the future'.<sup>59</sup>

Armed with his 'common sense' and nationalist vision of history, Sarkozy refused to apologise for the deeds of his ancestors and grudgingly asked historians, 'adept in repentance', 'how [they could] ask sons to repent for their fathers' mistakes, mistakes that

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<sup>54</sup> For a recent example, see Le Pen, 'Plan de Désendettement de la France et le Chiffage du Projet'.

<sup>55</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours à Caen'.

<sup>56</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours inaugural du congrès de l'UMP'.

<sup>57</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours à l'Université de Dakar Cheick Anta Diop', (Dakar, Sénégal 26 July 2007). See also Nicolas Sarkozy, *La République, Les Religions, L'Espérance; Entretien avec Thibaud Collin et Philippe Verdin* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2004). 98.

<sup>58</sup> For more detail, see Sadri Khiari, *La Contre-Révolution Coloniale en France; de de Gaulle à Sarkozy* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2009); François-Xavier Verschaves and Philippe Hauser, *Au Mépris des Peuples; Le Néocolonialisme Franco-Africain* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> Sarkozy, 'Discours à l'Université de Dakar Cheick Anta Diop'.

often their fathers only made in [the intelligentsia's] imagination'.<sup>60</sup> Sarkozy ignored the symbolic importance of an acknowledgement of past misdeeds. Highlighting further Sarkozy's lack of consistency, the presidential candidate simultaneously went against the 'culture of repentance' to attract the Front National electorate, and made sure to acknowledge the atrocity of the Holocaust in order to keep the support of key Jewish figures such as Simone Veil.<sup>61</sup>

To sum up, for Sarkozy, the situation in 2007 was simple: the French had 'to choose between those who like France and those who display their hatred of [it]'.<sup>62</sup> By the presidential elections, Sarkozy had made himself the only possibility, the only choice. His appropriation of key historical events and concepts led him to embody the 'voice' of the French people, and to incarnate the 'neither left nor right' candidate, a concept which had become in the 1990s a slogan for the Front National. His focus on concepts such as insecurity, national identity and immigration, along with his credentials as the leader of a 'moderate' right-wing party, made him the best candidate for the growing fringe of the population which had been seduced by the Le Pen alternative, and yet repulsed by his extremist image. Sarkozy made sure not to alienate the Front National electorate. A few months before the 2007 presidential elections, he made it clear that 'yes, [he] was trying to appeal to the Front National electorate', and that he 'would go and get them one by one' if necessary.<sup>63</sup> On 2 October 2006, he told UMP supporters and colleagues that 'as soon as I say something a bit strong, I am told I am trying to appeal to the Front National electorate. [...] Well, that's entirely correct. Why shouldn't I talk to an electorate that was ours?'<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours à Toulon', (Toulon 7 February 2007).

<sup>61</sup> Simone Veil is one of the central figures of Gaullism, who survived the concentration camps. She was a popular minister of health, but was also the first woman to become president of the European Parliament, a post she held between 1979 and 1982. According to a survey, Veil is the most liked woman in France in 2010. *Le Journal du Dimanche*, "Veil, Femme Préférée des Français," *Le Journal du Dimanche* (5 March 2010), <http://www.lejdd.fr/Societe/Actualite/Veil-femme-preferee-des-Francais-177051/>.

<sup>62</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, 'Discours à Nice', (Nice 30 March 2007).

<sup>63</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, "Nicolas Sarkozy répond aux lecteurs du *Parisien*, Entretien de Nicolas Sarkozy," *Le Parisien/Aujourd'hui en France* 28 March 2006. After Mégret's MNR seceded from the Front National, Sarkozy, then leader of Chirac's RPR, declared himself favourable to welcoming 'electors and militants who wanted to move away from their party'. Gautier, *Les Extrêmes Droites en France*: 396. The Italian version of Sarkozy's book *Témoignages* was prefaced by 'former' neo-fascist Gianfranco Fini, leader of Alleanza Nazionale.

<sup>64</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, "Discours à la Journée Parlementaire de l'UMP," (Paris 2 October 2006).

It proved a very wise move. The 2007 elections witnessed mass migration of the Front National electorate towards Sarkozy's candidature in the first round, leaving Jean-Marie Le Pen with 'only' 10% of the vote. By suggesting that he understood Le Pen's electorate and shared its fears, Sarkozy was able in part to gain its support. Surveys suggested that between 21 and 38% of Le Pen's 2002 electorate voted for Sarkozy in the first round of the 2007 elections.<sup>65</sup> In the second round, two-thirds of Le Pen's voters transferred to the UMP candidate.<sup>66</sup> For Nonna Mayer, the *Lepéno-Sarkozystes* surveyed showed that this shift was directly related to Sarkozy's borrowing of Le Pen's rhetoric and political themes.<sup>67</sup> It seemed that a large proportion of the workers who had previously turned to Le Pen had made their way to Sarkozy's ranks. The director of polling company IFOP stated that it was an 'exploit' for Sarkozy to have become the workers' favourite candidate in 2007 (26%).<sup>68</sup> This exploit should be relativised though as, according to the same poll, Socialist candidate Royal obtained 25% of the workers' vote while Le Pen was down to 16%. This could be explained by the scars left by the 2002 elections and the fear of many workers that Le Pen could access the second round again, forcing them to cast a 'useful vote' (*vote utile*).

## Conclusion

By the 2007 elections, Sarkozy had created a rhetorical rupture between himself and the other candidates. In his rhetoric, he regrouped around his candidature a very wide electorate stretching from the centre to the extreme right. He was the ultimate paradox: he appeared strong on immigration and crime, an original alternative to the establishment though having been part of governments for a long time, and a defender against evil capitalists, while a friend of the wealthy. He appeared both a reassuring male figure to the most conservative and authoritarian electorates, and a modern, original politician standing strong against the establishment. In a country where abstention had become the 'strongest

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<sup>65</sup> Jocelyn Evans and Gilles Ivaldi, 'L'extrême droite à la dérive : recomposition à droite', *Revue Politique et Parlementaire* 109, no. 1044 (2007): 119.

<sup>66</sup> Shields, 'Support for Le Pen in France: Two Elections in Trompe L'Oeil', 65.

<sup>67</sup> Nonna Mayer, 'Comment Nicolas Sarkozy a rétréci l'électorat de Le Pen', *Revue Française de Science Politique* 57, no. 3-4 (2007): 439-40.

<sup>68</sup> Bruno Jeudy, '2012, le match pour l'électorat populaire', *JDD* (24 April 2011), <http://www.lejdd.fr/Election-presidentielle-2012/Actualite/2012-le-match-pour-l-electorat-populaire-303523/>.

party' and where smaller parties gathered a large part of the protest vote, many found in Sarkozy's numerous faces something appealing to their particular situation.

Sarkozy therefore owed much to the extreme right success since the 1990s and in return, the extreme right owed him much for popularising and mainstreaming its ideas. As previously noted, the expansion of the extreme right was limited so long as it remained a protest vote party. However, with the mainstreaming of its ideas by the moderate right and the lack of a response from the moderate left,<sup>69</sup> part of the Front National's programme and the rhetoric central to its strategy have become widely accepted as part of the political establishment, cleared from the stigma attached to Le Pen's party. For Van der Brug et al., this normalisation (that is, being considered 'democratic and non-violent') is key to the further growth of the party as it separates those parties from marginalised neo-fascist organisations.<sup>70</sup> In such a setting, while Sarkozy obtained a landslide victory in 2007, the 2012 elections made Sarkozy a one-term president. After over four years of presidency, Sarkozy's pre-election ratings were at an all-time low. The strategy had remained the same as in 2007: throughout the campaign, while he paid lip-service to his open-door politics (*politique d'ouverture*) and promised to continue inviting centre and left-wing personalities into his government, Sarkozy increasingly took aim at Le Pen and her electorate.<sup>71</sup>

This strategy appeared to fail for the first round, and, for the first time, the Front National became a force to be reckoned with, registering over 12% in all but one *département*. More than the percentage (17.9%), which was higher than her father's best (16.9%), it is the fact that she managed to reach such a level despite 'strong' electoral

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<sup>69</sup> As shown by Van Spanje's research, 'if an anti-immigration party has success and the issue becomes salient, all other parties have incentives to take up a restrictive policy position – not just the niche party's immediate competitors. A left-wing party may attempt to reduce its losses to anti-immigration challengers by withdrawing its support for the ideal of the multicultural society'. Joost Van Spanje, 'Contagious Parties : Anti-Immigration Parties and Their Impact on Other Parties' Immigration Stances in Contemporary Western Europe', *Party politics* 16, no. 5 (2010): 579; *ibid.* In fact, by fuelling the successes of immigration parties, the moderate left can even attempt to reduce the mainstream right's electoral base.

<sup>70</sup> Van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie, 'Why some anti-immigrant parties fail and others succeed: A two-step model of aggregate electoral support', 546. For the difference in appeal between neo-fascist and populist parties, see Matt Golder, 'Explaining Variation In The Success Of Extreme Right Parties In Western Europe', *Comparative Political Studies* 36, no. 4 (2003): 459.

<sup>71</sup> Aurelien Mondon, *Mainstreaming the Extreme Right in France and Australia: A Populist Hegemony?* (Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, forthcoming 2012).

participation (only 20% abstention compared to over 28% in 2002). Le Pen's record is even more striking in terms of votes. In the 2002 earthquake, her father had received 4.8 million votes. After five years of Sarkozism which saw the tide ebb for the Front National to 3.8 million votes in 2007, a first fall since 1988, Le Pen gathered almost 6.5 million. The legitimisation and mainstreaming of her party's politics certainly played an important role in her sudden rise after years of stagnation and even decline. As the Front National vote jumped by 2.7 million, Sarkozy's plummeted by almost 1.7 million. There is little doubt that many of those who had voted for Sarkozy in 2007 (re)turned to the original in 2012.

As expected, Hollande won the second round of the elections. However, the margin was much narrower than expected and further demonstrated the appeal of populist politics. Despite an extremely right-wing campaign, Sarkozy managed to gather more than 48% of the electorate, which showed that the mainstreaming of the extreme right, its ideas and discourse, were here to stay. While many in France felt reassured by Sarkozy's defeat and the beginning of a 'normal' presidency, Hollande's campaign showed some troubling headways into populist rhetoric, and many times, the Socialist candidate appeared trapped in a race with Sarkozy. Co-director of Hollande's campaign, Aquilino Morelle, made it clear early on that 'the idea was not to leave the Front National voters to Sarkozy: there are amongst them some left-wing voters who have been lead astray'.<sup>72</sup> Between the two rounds of the presidential elections, Hollande reassured Le Pen's electorate that, if elected, he 'would *of course* keep the law against the burqa' and reminded them that he had voted in favour of the ban in 2010.<sup>73</sup> During that same interview, he also 'insisted' that it was 'necessary, indeed essential, to limit economic migration'. During his mandate, Hollande will have to make the difficult choice either to distance himself from his predecessor and his populism, at the risk of alienating many who have come to see issues of immigration and culture within a Sarkozist common sense framework, or attempt to reach the populist

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<sup>72</sup> David Revault d'Allonnes and Thomas Wieder, 'Présidentielle : le camp Hollande ne veut pas 'laisser à Sarkozy les électeurs du FN'', *Le Monde* (23 April 2012), [http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/article/2012/04/23/le-camp-hollande-ne-veut-pas-laisser-a-sarkozy-les-electeurs-du-fn\\_1689684\\_1471069.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/article/2012/04/23/le-camp-hollande-ne-veut-pas-laisser-a-sarkozy-les-electeurs-du-fn_1689684_1471069.html).

<sup>73</sup> Jean-Michel Apathie, 'François Hollande, candidat PS, vendredi sur RTL : 'La limitation de l'immigration économique est indispensable'', in *La Matinale*, ed. Vincent Parizot (Paris: RTL, 27 April 2012), my emphasis.

electorate. Either approach is bound to reinforce the Front National and its ideas, in the short term at least.

One thing has remained certain: those who had predicted the death of the Front National in 2007 have been proven wrong. In fact, Marine Le Pen was right: her father's 2007 setback was to some extent the victory of his ideas. On 12 April 2010, the National Commission of Human Rights in France made public its 20<sup>th</sup> annual report on racism.<sup>74</sup> Members of the commission found that Pandora's box had been opened and that the lines around what was acceptable in politics had moved dramatically. Two years later, the almost 6.5 million French voters who chose Marine Le Pen as best potential candidate for the presidency, showed the Front National had become mainstream.

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<sup>74</sup> CNDCH, 'La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie', ed. Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme (Paris: CNDCH, 2010).

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